The Early Works of Nakagami Kenji (2):
A Theoretical Examination of Self-Annihilation in “Misaki” (The Cape)

KAKIUCHI Kengo

In Part 1 of this study, I discussed the expression of a single theme, the death of the author’s older brother, as it evolved in Nakagami Kenji’s early works.

The aim of the present paper is to define the position of Nakagami Kenji’s early works. Treating “Misaki” (The Cape) as the culmination of the early work, I examine the changes in its fictional topology using an approach that is an extension of the argument in Part 1.

“The Cape” can be considered the culmination of Nakagami’s early work because, firstly, in it the central topos of his fictional space, the mokib (”alleyways”), is invested with symbolic significance for the first time, and, secondly, in Akiyuki it has a hero capable of seeking the meaning of this space. In acquiring these two symbolic entities, Nakagami’s writing takes on great inherent potential.

The literary value of Nakagami’s fiction is enhanced by the drama of Akiyuki’s relations with those around him, and the stage—the alleyways—effectively comes into existence in a process whereby the drama that Akiyuki creates reshapes the alleys and gives them new meaning. Thus, “The Cape” and the works that led to it are important texts in that all of the later potential is developed in them.

After noting this significance, I examine the meaning that his brother’s death held for Nakagami in terms of “splitting of the self,” and I redefine the position of the early works as an exploration of the possibilities of identity in fictional space. This perspective enables us to discuss the topology of the writing that culminated in “The Cape” in both its textual and its biographical aspects, thus leading to a more integrated understanding of the early Nakagami Kenji.